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SUBJECT: VENETO DC CONGRESS BACKS ZACCAGNINI, FEB 28, 29, 1975

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SUMMARY: VENETO CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS HELD THEIR FIFTH REGIONAL CONGRESS IN VERONA ELECTING MAJORITY OF DELEOATES TO DC NATIONAL CONGRESS IN ROME MARCH 18 FAVORABLE TO PRESENT DC NATIONAL SECRETARY BENIGNO ZACCAGNINI. VENETO RESULTS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT SINCE REGION IS PRINCIPAL DC STRONG-HOLD. CONGRESS WAS DOM NATED BY PREOCCUPATION WITH DC'S PRESENT WEAKENED STATE VIS-A-VIS COMMUNISTS. SELF-CRITICISM WAS ORDER OF DAY, WITH CRIES FOR REFORM INCESSANT AND OFTEN CONVINCING. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH PSI SEEMED MORE RITUALISTIC THAN WELL THOUGHT OUT. ATTITUDES TOWARDS PCI VARIED SOMEWHAT, WITH EVERYONE REJECTING HISTORIC COMPROMISE BUT SOME URGING CLOSER DAY-TO-DAY COOPERATION WITH PNI. VOTING RESULTS CLEARLY SHOWED LOCAL SHIFT TO LEFT IN DELEGATE PREFERENCES, WITH BISAGLIA - PICCOLI FORCES LOSING GROUND TO FORZE NUOVE AND OTHER LEFTIST ELEMENTS. ALTHOUGH HANDFUL OF ABLE AND ATTRACTIVE PERSONALITIES PARTICIPATED IN CONGRESS, NO ONE EMERGED HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE REST, LEAVING VENETO DC WITHOUT RECOGNIZED LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

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1. FIFTH REGIONAL CONGRESS OF VENETO CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS SAW 337 DELEGATES FROM SEVEN VENETO PROVINCES ELECT 83 DELEGATES TO THIRTEENTH NATIONAL CONGRESS DUE TO START IN ROME MARCH 18. CONGRESS CONSIDERED TOTAL OF NINE SLATES REPRESENTING THREE DIFFERENT GROUPS WITHIN VENETO DC: 1) PARTY'S LEFT WING (BASE, PART OF FORZE NUOVE, MOROTEL, RUMORIANI AND VENETO'S FANFANIANI, WHOSE LEFTIST ORIGINS PUT THEM NOW IN OPPOSITION WITH OTHER FANFANIANI AROUND COUNTRY), ALL FAVORING ZACCAGNINI; 2) EXTREME LEFT WING OF DC, LED BY ON. CARLO FRACANZANI (FORZE NUOVE) AND SUPPORTING ZACCAGNINI; AND 3) MINISTER ANTONIO BISAGLIA'S CENTER POSITION DOROTEL SLATES, WHO WANT FORLANI FOR NATIONAL PARTY SECRETARY. VOTING GAVE ZACCAGNINI 56.5 PERCENT OF DELEGATES AND FORLANI 41 PERCENT. REST WERE BACKERS OF ANDREOTTI. RESULTS REFLECTED SHIFT WITHIN VENETO DC IN FAVOR OF PARTY LEFT WING AND LOSS OF INFLUENCE BY DOROTEL GROUP (WHOSE PRINCIPAL LEADER NOW BISAGLIA).

2. CONGRESS SUFFUSED WITH DC BREAST-BEATING AND CLAMOR FOR REFORM, WHICH WAS MANDATORY RHETORIC EVEN FOR OLD WARHORSES LIKE RUMOR WHO WERE OBVIOUSLY THEMSELVES TARGETS OF MUCH OF CRITICISM. MOST OF CONGRESS' THIRTY-ODD "SPEAKERS" FOCUSED ON PARTY'S OWN PROBLEMS AND NEED TO CLEAN HOUSE QUICKLY. SEVERAL SPEAKERS NOTED FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN ITALIAN SOCIETY THAT HAVE OCCURRED UNDER DC'S NOSE AND SAID FLATLY THAT PARTY IS FINISHED IF IT DOES NOT ADAPT QUICKLY TO NEW SITUATION. MOST OF ZACCAGNINI'S SUPPORTERS FASTENED ON NEED FOR NEW FACES AT TOP AS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IF PARTY IS TO START RECOUPING LOSSES. LEFT WINGER FRACANZANI, SPEAKING JUST AFTER RUMOR AND APPARENTLY AIMING HIS REMARKS IN RUMOR'S DIRECTION, RUBBED DC LEADERS' NOSES IN CROCIANI MESS, STATING THAT PARTY CANNOT CONDEMN CROCIANI EXCESSES FROM A LOOF POSITION AS THOUGH IT WERE NOT PARTY ITSELF WHICH PUT CROCIANI WHERE HE WAS. GIUSEPPE MARTON, OF FRACANZANI'S GROUP, SPOKE OF "REJECTION" OF DC THAT BEGAN IN 1968 AND HAS CONTINUED THROUGH DIVORCE REFERENDUM, SARDEGNA LOCAL ELECTIONS IN SPRING 1974, AND THE JUNE 15, 1975 ELECTIONS. HE CALLED FOR URGENT LEADERSHIP CHANGE AND SAID ZACCAGNINI REPRESENTS ONLY HOPE FOR RENEWAL. ETTORE BONALBERTI, YOUNG AND BRIGHT DELEGATE FROM ROVIGO, FOLLOWED SAME LINE.

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3. ALTHOUGH MOST PRESENTATIONS WERE INWARD-LOOKING, SEVERAL CALLED ATTENTION TO STATE OF COUNTRY. BOTH FRACANZANI AND MARTON, FOR EXAMPLE, CRITICIZED CONGRESS FOR OVERLOOKING NATION'S PRESSING PROBLEMS INCLUDING UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION.

4. DC RELATIONSHIP WITH PSI AND PCI EMERGED, ALONG WITH NEED FOR REFORM, AS IMPORTANT TOPIC OF DISCUSSION. ALL SPEAKERS MENTIONED "ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP" BETWEEN DC AND PSI.

BISAGLIA STRESSED NEED FOR BETTER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. NO ONE, HOWEVER, MADE CREDITABLE ATTEMPT TO DEFINE WHAT A CHANGED ATTITUDE TOWARD SOCIALISTS MIGHT BE. THIS LED TO PRIVATE SPECULATION AMONG AT LEAST SOME DELEGATES THAT DC LEADERS AT CONGRESS HAD NOTHING MORE IN MIND WITH REGARD TO SOCIALISTS THAN CONTINUATION OF FORMER RELATIONSHIP.

5. HISTORIC COMPROMISE WITH PCI WAS UNANIMOUSLY REJECTED, THOUGH VARIOUS SPEAKERS TALKED OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF "CONFRONTATION" WITH COMMUNISTS. THESE RANGED FROM ADVOCATION OF ARM'S LENGTH POSITION SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH NOW OBTAINS TO POSITION ADVANCED BY FRACANZANI THAT DID NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBLE COOPERATION ON SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OR PROPOSALS.

6. ABORTION WAS MENTIONED ONLY IN PASSING UNTIL ON. TINA ANSELMINI (ONLY WOMAN SPEAKER AT CONGRESS) SPOKE ON SECOND DAY. SHE STATED THAT REFERENDUM ON ABORTION MUST BE AVOIDED BY ENACTING MODIFICATION NOW BEFORE PARLIAMENT. EXISTING LAW IS PART OF FASCIST CRIMINAL CODE AND DC CANNOT BE IN POSITION OF SUPPORTING IT. ON OTHER HAND, IF LAW IS ABOLISHED BY REFERENDUM, ABORTION WOULD BE COMPLETELY LEGAL, A POSITION ODIOS TO DC ON PRINCIPLE AND NEW LEGISLATION WOULD IN ANY EVENT HAVE TO BE ENACTED. EITHER WAY, DC LOSES. VERONA DELEGATE DANILO ANDRIOLI, A BISAGLIA SUPPORTER, ALSO OPPOSED REFERENDUM. "MORAL ISSUES," HE SAID SIMPLY, "CANNOT BE DECIDED BY REFERENDUM IN TIMES OF DECADENCE".

7. EARLY ELECTIONS WERE NOT MENTIONED BY ANY SPEAKER, DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY. BRIGHT YOUNG VENICE DC PROVINCIAL PARTY SECRETARY MARINO CORTESE TOLD US PRIVATELY THAT DC CERTAIN TO LOSE IN EARLY ELECTIONS, FROM WHICH ONLY SOCIALISTS ARE IN POSITION TO BENEFIT, DESPITE THEIR PROTESTATIONS.

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8. MENTION OF THE UNITED STATES WAS SPARSE IN CONGRESS BUT NOT ABSENT. REFERENCES TO LOCKHEED AND OTHER SCANDALS WERE USED TO ILLUSTRATE NEED FOR REFORM IN PARTY RATHER THAN TO CRITICIZE U.S. MULTINATIONALS. DIRECT CRITICISM OF ALLEGED AMERICAN INTERFERENCE IN ITALIAN AFFAIRS, HOWEVER, DID COME FROM FRACANZANI. HE CHARGED THAT AMERICAN PRONOUNCEMENTS ON WHAT CONSTITUTES ACCEPTABLE GOVERNMENT IN ITALY WERE INCOMPATIBLE WITH ITALIAN SOVEREIGNTY, RECEIVING STRONG APPLAUSE. VENICE PARTY HEAD CORTESE TOLD US FRACANZANI HAD INDEED STRUCK RESPONSIVE CHORD AMONG DELEGATES. HE ADMITTED, AT SAME TIME, THAT "HEAVYHANDED" AMERICAN ANTI-COMMUNIST PRONOUNCEMENTS MIGHT HAVE BRACING EFFECT IN ITALY OF CALLING PUBLIC ATTENTION TO CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINUING TO VOTE COMMUNIST.

9. ALTHOUGH COMUNIONE AND LIBERAZIONE DID NOT COME UP WITH DELEGATE SLATE AT VERONA CONGRESS (AS WAS CASE IN LOMBARDY), PADOVA C&L MEMBER GRAZIANO DE BELLINI SPOKE AT LENGTH ON WHAT HE SAW AS DC'S PROPER ROLE. DE BELLINI WAS NOT WARMLY RECEIVED BY AUDIENCE. CORTESE CONFIRMED TO US THAT C&L NOT STRONG IN VENETO, WHERE ITS CLERICAL CHARACTER NOT APPROVED. MOVEMENT'S MAIN STORONGHOLD, IN REGION, HE SAID, IS PADOVA.

10. FOUR LOCAL SPEAKERS STOOD OUT AND WERE VIGOROUSLY
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APPLAUDED FOR EFFORTS. GISSEPPE MARTON CALLED ZACCAGNINI ONLY PROPONENT IN DC OF REALLY VITAL LINE AND URGED PARTY TO CHANGE "METHODS, POLICIES, IDEAS, AND MEN." ETTORE BONALBERTI, ALSO SUPPORTER OF ZACCAGNINI, SPOKE VIGOROUSLY ON BEHALF OF DC LEFT. FELICE CONTIERO, YOUNG DELEGATE FROM VICENZA, SAID DC HAS PROGRESSIVELY LOST CONTACT WITH POPULAR INSTITUTIONS AND PCI HAS FILLED SPACES. GIOVANNI BISSON, A RUMOR SUPPORTER, MADE SPEECH THAT WAS ORGANIZED AND INTELLIGENT. THESE MEN ARE IN LATE THIRTIES OR EARLY FORTIES AND DESERVE WATCHING.

11. OF NATIONAL LEVEL SPEAKERS, TWO MADE FIERY SPEECHES THAT OBVIOUSLY FOUND FAVOR WITH AUDIENCE. ANSELMI SAID REAL PCI DANGER IS SUCCESSFUL COMMUNIST INSERTION OF MARXIST IDEAS INTO ITALIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND POINTED TO ZACCAGNINI AS PARTY'S ONLY HOPE. PERHAPS HOTTEST SPEAKER OF ALL WAS FRACANZANI, WHOSE CRITICISM OF CORRUPTION AND TIRED BLOOD IN

DC WAS POINTED AND SUSTAINED AND WHO, AS NOTED ABOVE, WAS SOLE SPEAKER DIRECTLY TO CRITICIZE AMERICANS.

12. OTHER NATIONAL LEVEL SPEAKERS WERE MINISTERS ANTONIO BISAGLIA, MARIANO RUMOR, AND LUCIANO DAL FALCO. RUMOR, OBVIOUSLY TRYING HARD TO CALM TROUBLED WATERS, URGED ALL TO ADMIT RESPONSIBILITY FOR PRESENT SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS IN DC, GOING TO DISARMING LENGTHS TO COUNT HIMSELF AMONG MOST BLAMEWORTHY. TACTIC DID NOT SEEM TO IMPRESS THOSE CALLING FOR LEADERSHIP CHANGES. CORTESE, IN FACT, TOLD US RUMOR IS FINISHED IN VENETO (HIS HOME AREA) AND MAY WELL NOT BE PART OF NEXT GOVERNMENT.

13. ONE IMPRESSION EMERGING FROM CONGRESS WAS THAT OF ABSENCE OF DOMINANT LEADER AMONG VENETO CHRISTIAN DEMOCATS. VERONA'S OLD AND RESPECTED MAYOR, RENATO GOZZI, MADE WELCOMING REMARKS ON FIRST DAY AND THEN APPEARED TO RETIRE FROM SCENE. VERONA PARTY SECRETARY GIACINTO SANTACATERINA, WHO MADE OPENING SPEECH AT CONGRESS, DID NOTHING ELSE. VENICE PROVINCIAL SACTETARY MARINO CORTESE DID NOT EVEN GIVE PUBLIC PRESENTATION. AND SO ON VENETO DC, THEREFORE, SEEM TO HAVE NO DOMINANT LEADER, THOUGH TALENTED MEN ARE VISIBLE AT INTERMEDIATE LEVEL.

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14. ALTHOUGH ZACCAGNINI WAS DARLING OF VERONA CONGRESS'S MOST VOCAL AND ATTRACTIVE DELEGATES, COMMITMENT OF SOME DELEGATES NOW PLEDGED TO HIM MAY BE LESS THAN TOTAL. HETEROGENEITY OF HIS VENETO SUPPORTERS MEANS THAT SOME COULD DROP BY WAYSIDE BEFORE PARTY SECRETARY ELECTIONS OR THAT, ONCE ELECTED, ZACCAGNINI COULD LACK ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR REFORMS BEING URGED BY PARTY'S LEFT WING. RUMOR, FOR EXAMPLE, ONLH A RECNT CONVERT TO ZACCAGNINI, CAN HARDLY BE EXPECTED TO GIVE FULL ENDORSEMENT TO QUICK GENERATIONAL CHANGE, A PRINCIPAL GOAL OF DC REFORMERS. NEVERTHELESS, VENETO CONGRESS APPEARS TO CONFIRM THAT DC THERE HAS CROSSED WATERSHED TO NEW BALANCE OF INTERNAL FORCES FAVORABLE TO PUTTING PARTY INTO A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS.FINA

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